

Statement of
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Before the
House Government Reform Committee
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources

June 27, 2005

“Fighting Meth in America’s Heartland: Assessing Federal, State, and Local Efforts”

Chairman Souder, and distinguished members of the House Government Reform Committee-Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, my name is Timothy Ogden and I am the Associate Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s (DEA) Chicago Field Division. On behalf of DEA Administrator, Karen Tandy, and Chicago Field Division Special Agent in Charge, Richard Sanders, I appreciate your invitation to testify today regarding the DEA’s efforts to combat methamphetamine in the State of Minnesota.

Overview

Until the late 1980s, methamphetamine was a relatively unknown drug outside of the states along the West Coast. However, by the early 1990s, methamphetamine was gaining in popularity and began spreading across the country. In 1990, only two states reported the seizure of 20 or more methamphetamine labs. In 2004, this number had skyrocketed to 41 states. Today, few places in the United States have not felt its impact, and Minnesota is no exception.

In an effort to combat methamphetamine, the DEA aggressively targets those who traffic in and manufacture this dangerous drug, as well as those who traffic in the chemicals used to produce methamphetamine. In Minnesota and across the nation, we have initiated and led successful enforcement efforts focusing on methamphetamine and its precursor chemicals and have worked jointly with our federal, state and local law enforcement partners to combat this drug. The efforts of law enforcement have resulted in tremendously successful investigations, which have dismantled and disrupted high-level methamphetamine trafficking organizations, as well as dramatically reduced the amount of pseudoephedrine entering our country.

We are well aware that combating this drug requires a concerted effort by law enforcement and we are working with our partners across the country to fight methamphetamine. Another tool in this fight comes from the DEA’s Office of Training, which shares our expertise by training thousands of our state and local partners from all the over country, as well as our international counterparts. The DEA also provides cleanup assistance to law enforcement agencies across the country, as they battle this drug.

National Threat Assessment and Trends

Mexico-based and California-based Mexican traffickers control “super labs” and produce the majority of methamphetamine available throughout the United States. A “super lab” is defined as a laboratory capable of producing 10 pounds or more of methamphetamine within a production cycle. The supply of methamphetamine in the United States is supplemented by multiple “small toxic laboratories” (STLs), which are generally not affiliated with major drug trafficking organizations. No precise breakdown is available, but current drug and lab seizure data suggests that roughly two-thirds of the methamphetamine used in the United States comes from larger labs, increasingly in Mexico, and that probably about one-third of the methamphetamine consumed in this country comes from medium-to-small domestic laboratories.

Mexican criminal organizations control most mid-level and retail methamphetamine distribution in the Pacific, Southwest, and West Central regions of the United States, as well as much of the distribution in the Great Lakes and Southeast regions. Mexican midlevel distributors sometimes supply methamphetamine to Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs (OMGs) and Hispanic gangs for retail distribution throughout the country.

Asian methamphetamine distributors (Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese) are active in the Pacific region, although Mexican criminal groups trafficking in “ice methamphetamine” have supplanted Asian criminal groups as the dominant distributors of this drug type in Hawaii. OMGs distribute methamphetamine throughout the country, and reporting indicates that they are particularly prevalent in many areas of the Great Lakes region, New England and New York/New Jersey regions.

The rapid spread of methamphetamine throughout the United States is due in part to the proliferation of STLs, which are found in rural areas, tribal and federal lands, big cities, and suburbs. Although the amount of methamphetamine actually produced by these STLs is relatively small, the adverse impact they have on local communities is enormous. The impact of the drug itself on the abusers is a serious enough problem, but it does not stop there. This drug’s victims include victims of methamphetamine-related crime, drug endangered children, the environment and government entities on all levels, which are strained by the responsibility of combating STLs.

Minnesota Threat Assessment

Methamphetamine in Minnesota is a two-pronged problem. First, large quantities of methamphetamine produced by Mexican organizations are transported into and distributed throughout the state. Mexican traffickers also control the transportation, distribution, and bulk sales of cocaine, marijuana and small amounts of black-tar heroin. Mexican groups, who receive their “product” from the West Coast or Mexico, typically transport their methamphetamine via couriers, through the U.S. mail or by commercial carriers. As a general rule, the upper echelon Mexican distributors in Minnesota transport the majority of their drug proceeds back to family members residing in Mexico.

Second, like so many other Midwestern States, law enforcement agencies in Minnesota are faced with a large number of STLs. These STLs produce relatively small quantities of methamphetamine, but have a huge impact on the people of Minnesota. Local independent dealers are the primary methamphetamine producers in Minnesota. In outlying areas of the state, these groups and OMGs distribute methamphetamine in small quantities. The Birch reduction (Nazi)

method (using anhydrous ammonia) is the predominant method used to manufacture methamphetamine in Minnesota. The majority of methamphetamine labs discovered in Minnesota produce less than one to two ounces per “cook” several times a week. Most of the precursor and reagent chemicals used to produce this drug are purchased from legitimate suppliers, usually convenience stores. Occasionally, anhydrous ammonia is stolen from farms in agricultural areas.

Methamphetamine lab-related seizures in the State of Minnesota, as reported to the El Paso Intelligence Center (National Clandestine Laboratory Seizure System – as of 6/17/05) for FY-2002 through FY-2004 are listed below. It should be noted that some State and local law enforcement agencies choose not to report their clandestine laboratory numbers to EPIC, so these numbers are lower than the actual numbers of labs in Minnesota:

	Chem/Glass/Equip	Dumpsites	Labs	Total
FY-2002	42	15	158	215
FY-2003	72	56	188	316
FY-2004	32	40	120	192

Battling Methamphetamine – Labs and Precursor Chemicals

As a result of our efforts and those of our law enforcement partners in the U.S. and Canada, we have seen a dramatic decline in methamphetamine “super labs” in the U.S. In 2004, 55 “super labs” were seized in the United States, the majority of which were in California. This is a dramatic decrease from the 246 “super labs” seized in 2001. This decrease in “super labs” is largely a result of DEA’s enforcement successes against suppliers of bulk shipments of precursor chemicals, notably ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Law enforcement has also seen a huge reduction in the amount of pseudoephedrine, ephedrine, and other precursor chemicals seized at the Canadian border. But with the drop in “super lab” activity in the United States, however, we have also seen an increase of “super lab” activity in Mexico.

In addition, the DEA has been working to ensure that only legitimate businesses with adequate chemical controls are licensed to handle bulk pseudoephedrine and ephedrine in the United States. In the past seven years, more than 2,000 chemical registrants have been denied, surrendered, or withdrawn their registrations or applications as a result of DEA investigations. Between 2001 and 2004, DEA Diversion Investigators physically inspected more than half of the 3,000 chemical registrants at their places of business. We investigated the adequacy of their security safeguards to prevent the diversion of chemicals to the illicit market, and audited their recordkeeping to ensure compliance with federal regulations.

The DEA is also working with our global partners to target international methamphetamine traffickers and to increase chemical control efforts abroad. The DEA has worked hand in hand with its law enforcement counterparts in Canada, Hong Kong and Mexico, and regulatory authorities to

identify and investigate attempts to divert pseudoephedrine.

DEA's Efforts in Minnesota

The DEA's Minneapolis District Office is part of the Chicago Field Division, and covers the entire state. The office's enforcement efforts are led by DEA Special Agents and Task Force Officers from state and local agencies and federal agencies, who are assigned to the Minneapolis District Office. The Task Force Officers are deputized by DEA and have the same authority as DEA Special Agents. DEA Special Agents and Task Force Officers working together daily to enhance the strengths of all involved agencies and serves as a force multiplier, by which law enforcement can better attack the methamphetamine problem in Minnesota.

The DEA focuses its overall enforcement operations on the large regional, national and international drug trafficking organizations responsible for the majority of the drug supply in the United States. Within the State of Minnesota, we implement the same approach by focusing our investigative resources and efforts on the largest trafficking organizations operating within our area of responsibility. The DEA's enforcement efforts and those of our state and local counterparts have resulted in numerous successful investigations in Minnesota.

These investigations have involved various levels of methamphetamine traffickers and lab operators, including local traffickers and "cooks", gang members, repeat offenders and sources of supply from the West Coast. Individual investigations conducted by the Minneapolis District office have resulted in methamphetamine seizures totaling up to approximately 25 pounds. Laboratory analysis of methamphetamine exhibits acquired in investigations initiated by the Minneapolis District Office has documented purities ranging up to 99 and 100 percent. Since FY-2002, the Minneapolis District Office has made in excess of 500 methamphetamine-related arrests.

DEA's Clandestine Laboratory Training

In response to the spread of labs across the country, more and more state and local law enforcement officers require training to investigate and safely dismantle these labs. Since 1998, the DEA has offered a robust training program for our state and local partners. The DEA, through our Office of Training, provides basic and advanced clandestine laboratory safety training for state and local law enforcement officers and Special Agents at the DEA Clandestine Laboratory Training Facility. Instruction includes the Basic Clandestine Laboratory Certification School, the Advanced Site Safety School, and the Clandestine Laboratory Tactical School. Each course exceeds Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA)-mandated minimum safety requirements and is provided at no cost to qualified state and local law enforcement officers. As part of this training, approximately \$2,200 worth of personal protective equipment is issued to each student, allowing them to safely investigate these clandestine labs and work in this hazardous environment.

The DEA has trained more than 8,600 State and local law enforcement personnel (plus 1,900 DEA employees), since 1998, to conduct investigations and dismantle seized methamphetamine labs and protect the public from methamphetamine lab toxic waste. In the last four years (fiscal years), the DEA has provided clandestine laboratory training to more than 150 officers from Minnesota. Of this total, 52 have received training in FY-2005.

The Office of Training also provides clandestine laboratory awareness and “train the trainer” programs that can be tailored for a specific agency’s needs, with classes ranging in length from one to eight hours. Additionally, we provide in-service training and seminars for law enforcement groups, such as the Clandestine Laboratory Investigator's Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and have provided training to our counterparts in other countries regarding precursor chemical control, investigation and prosecution. This DEA training is pivotal to ensuring safe and efficient cleanup of methamphetamine lab hazardous waste.

Hazardous Waste Cleanup

When a federal, state or local agency seizes a clandestine methamphetamine laboratory, Environmental Protection Agency regulations require that the agency ensure that all hazardous waste materials are safely removed from the site. In 1990, the DEA established a Hazardous Waste Cleanup Program to address environmental concerns from the seizure of clandestine drug laboratories. This program promotes the safety of law enforcement personnel and the public by using qualified companies with specialized training and equipment to remove hazardous waste. To aid in environmentally sound clandestine drug laboratory cleanup, the DEA has enlisted the services of the private sector. Private contractors provide hazardous waste removal and disposal services to the DEA, as well as to state and local law enforcement agencies.

DEA's hazardous waste program, with the assistance of grants to state and local law enforcement, supports and funds the cleanup of a majority of the laboratories seized in the United States. Just in FY-2004, the DEA administered 10,061 state and local clandestine laboratory cleanups at a cost of \$18.6 million.

In Minnesota, from FY-2002 through FY-2005 (as of June 20, 2005), the DEA administered 947 lab cleanups, at a total cost of \$1,202,180.00. For FY-2005 (as of June 20, 2005), the DEA has thus far administered 144 cleanups in Minnesota at a cost of \$280,200.00.

Demand Reduction Efforts

The DEA is aware that Demand Reduction is an important aspect in law enforcement’s fight against methamphetamine, and the Minneapolis District Office is actively engaged in this effort. The DEA’s Demand Reduction Coordinators are Special Agents who are working all around the nation to raise awareness about the dangers of methamphetamine. These Special Agents bring law enforcement experience and expertise to communities dealing with the full range of methamphetamine issues, including small toxic labs, the health consequences of methamphetamine, community anti-methamphetamine initiatives, and legal penalties for methamphetamine production and trafficking, and other critical issues.

Since 2003, the Minneapolis District office’s Demand Reduction Coordinator has conducted 34 presentations in the Twin Cities area, reaching approximately 1,935 people. During this same time, in areas outside the Twin Cities, 75 presentations have been conducted, reaching approximately 7,800 people. Many of these presentations began as general drug-related topics, but they invariably evolve into methamphetamine discussions. These presentations do not include the programs that DEA has provided to school audiences.

Victim Witness Assistance Program

More than any other controlled substance, methamphetamine trafficking endangers children through exposure to drug abuse, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, toxic chemicals, hazardous waste, fire, and explosions. In response to these tragic phenomena, the DEA has enhanced its Victim Witness Program to identify, refer, and report these incidents to the proper state agencies. Each of the DEA's Field Divisions has a Victim/Witness Coordinator to ensure that all endangered children are identified and that each child's immediate safety is addressed at the scene through coordination with child welfare and health care service providers.

Conclusion

The DEA, both nationally and in Minnesota, is fully aware that the fight against methamphetamine must continue and we must stop the spread of this drug. Law enforcement has experienced some success, as is evidenced by the significant decrease in the number of "super labs" seized in this country and the huge reduction in pseudoephedrine seized at the Canadian border. To combat this epidemic, we are fighting methamphetamine on multiple fronts. Our enforcement efforts are focused, not only on the large-scale methamphetamine trafficking organizations distributing this drug, but also those who are involved in providing the precursor chemicals necessary to manufacture this poison.

The Minneapolis District Office is working closely with our state and local law partners to combat methamphetamine and the spread of small toxic labs. To more effectively and safely investigate and dismantle these labs, the Minneapolis District Office, through our Office of Training, has ensured that officers in Minnesota are provided with clandestine laboratory training. Additionally, our Demand Reduction Coordinator has taken an active role in heightening community awareness to this drug in Minnesota. As an agency, the DEA also has expanded our Victim Witness efforts to provide assistance to methamphetamine's victims.

Thank you for your recognition of this important issue and the opportunity to testify here today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.